

COASTWISE TRADE.

LETTER

FROM THE

SECRETARY OF THE TREASURY,

TRANSMITTING,

In compliance with the resolution of the House of February 4, 1859, the reason for the non-compliance with the joint resolution of May 14, 1856, relative to statistics of the coasting trade.

FEBRUARY 15, 1859.—Laid on the table and ordered to be printed.

TREASURY DEPARTMENT,
February 11, 1859.

SIR: In reply to the resolution adopted by the House of Representatives on the 4th instant, requesting to be informed why the joint resolution of the 14th of May, 1856, requiring the kinds, quantities, and values of merchandise, entered and cleared coastwise, to be exhibited in the annual report on commerce and navigation, has not been complied with, I have the honor to state that it has been found impossible, without further legislation, to obtain the information contemplated by the joint resolution.

It will be seen, by reference to the laws regulating the coasting trade, that the manifest of cargo is not required to set forth the character, quantity, or value of merchandise transported coastwise, but only the marks and numbers of the packages containing the same; and whatever instructions might be issued by the department, requiring specifications not prescribed by law, would be received as mere requests, which the shippers would have a right to disregard, and for the enforcement of which the department would have no legal power.

In view of the impossibility, under the existing provisions of law, of obtaining any reliable statistics of the coastwise commerce, my predecessor, in the bill consolidating the revenue laws, submitted by him to the last Congress, inserted a provision requiring the master of every ship or vessel "destined from a port in one great district to a port in another great district in the United States, except from a port in a State in one great district to a port in an adjoining State in another

great district," previously "to a clearance for the departure of such ship or vessel from one port in a great district to another port in another great district," to make out and subscribe duplicate manifests upon the sworn statements to be furnished by the owners, shippers or consignees of the cargo, and to verify the same on oath or affirmation before the collector, "of all goods, wares, and merchandise on board such ship or vessel, specifying in such manifests the marks and numbers of every cask, bag, box, chest, or package, containing the same, with a particular description or designation of the goods therein contained, as known in commerce, and the quantity thereof, together with the name and place of residence of every shipper and consignee," and to deliver such manifests to the collector.

The bill for consolidating the revenue laws which I had the honor to submit at the last session of Congress contained the same provisions, and to their failure to receive the approbation of that body is to be attributed the absence of statistics of the coasting trade in the reports of the department on commerce and navigation.

It will be seen that no provision was made for ascertaining the *value* of such merchandise, owing in part to the strong repugnance on the part of commercial men to expose the value of their goods, where it was deemed unnecessary. Besides, the information thus obtained would not be of a very reliable character, as there would be thrown around it none of those checks and precautions which are resorted to in case the value of the merchandise is sought for with a view to taxation.

It is to be also remarked that the provisions on the subject in the bills before mentioned confine the statistics to so much of the coasting trade as is carried on between the great coasting districts, excluding that between adjacent States and the trade on the lakes, which is as much as could be obtained without devolving any additional expense upon the appropriation for collecting the revenue.

The revenue force at present employed it is thought would prove adequate for the purpose indicated in the bill. But to extend the inquiry to the trade between adjoining States and the trade on the lakes would necessarily require a considerable increase to the existing number of officers of the customs, and also an additional charge upon the collection of the revenue.

All which is respectfully submitted.

HOWELL COBB,
Secretary of the Treasury.

Hon. JAMES L. ORR,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.